



**STRATEGY
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A NEW UNITED STATES STRATEGY FOR MEXICO

BY

**LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOSEPH R. NUNEZ
United States Army**

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

A NEW UNITED STATES STRATEGY FOR MEXICO

by

LTC Joseph R. Nunez
United States Army

Professor Donald M. Schulz
Project Advisor

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U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

ABSTRACT

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The current U.S. strategy for Mexico is out of balance and requires major changes. Only our economic relationship under the North American Free Trade Agreement is working well. Our political and military initiatives have not met with success. United States efforts to deal with Mexico on drug interdiction, counter-insurgency, human rights, and democratic expansion have largely failed because of our lack of a focussed and consistent strategy. The main focus of the paper is on the insurgency in southern Mexico. The insurgency is also of great significance to the United States because Mexico is a pivotal state, which means that we must be able to work better together to safeguard and promote security, prosperity, and democratic ideals. The author argues that a resurgence of guerilla activity could destabilize Mexico through internal and external factors. Recommendations are made to revamp U.S. strategy for Mexico that cover political, military, and development initiatives.

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Poor Mexico! So far from God and so close to the United States.
- An old Mexican saying

INTRODUCTION

The United States is in need of a new strategy for Mexico. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) requires the supplementation of effective political and military relations. The latter needs particular attention. Our ambitious efforts to incorporate Mexico's armed forces in anti-drug operations have largely failed. Older model helicopters furnished by the United States in a quickly devised program have experienced many maintenance problems. Because drug traffickers changed their shipment tactics, from air to ground transport, few military air interdiction missions developed, so the helicopters were used for other purposes. The United States had hoped that this program would assist in forging an alliance with the Mexican armed forces.¹

Instead, the Mexican military is reducing its participation in the program and other joint projects. Beyond their irritation over equipment readiness problems, there is growing distrust as the United States has expressed concerns over reports of military corruption.² The arrest of dozens of Mexican officers - most notably, General Jesus Gutierrez Rebollo, the head of the federal anti-drug agency - for collusion with drug

criminals has eroded international and domestic confidence in the military.³

Drug interdiction is one of many examples of strategic failure - the inability of Washington to take a longer and deeper view in developing stronger relations with Mexico, something extremely important to the economic, political and military security of the United States. Because of its unique form of democracy, the United States tends to be reactive, rather than proactive, which often results in poorly organized programs that are too quickly thrown together.⁴ It was a mistake to enlist the Mexican military in this law enforcement mission, something we would not assign to our own armed forces. To be fair, the Mexican government made the same mistake in giving it a drug interdiction mission that should have gone to the police. Yet, the Mexican police had proven to be extremely corrupt and had lost the confidence of the government to effectively discharge their counter-drug duties.⁵

The same conundrum holds true for the mission of quelling insurgency in southern Mexico. Insurgency movements in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero and other states have done much to threaten the legitimacy of the Mexican government. These rebellions exposed anti-democratic characteristics of a regime dominated by a single party.

Overall, law enforcement officials have failed to administer the law fairly in times of peace and grossly violated human rights in times of conflict.⁶ As the military increased its internal security role, its reputation has become tarnished because of human rights abuses that first came to light when it suppressed the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) rebellion in January 1994. The armed forces committed acts of brutality, including extrajudicial executions and torture.⁷ The insurgencies have not yet been quelled, in spite of some temporary cease-fires, which prompted U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to make a statement before a Senate committee in June 1998 that our country was "pressing" Mexico to solve the Chiapas conflict. This prompted Mexican Foreign Minister Rosario Green to angrily reply that "we neither need nor accept foreign pressure."⁸ Traditional Mexican sensitivities to U.S. criticism were exacerbated because our country had done little to assist since the uprising began.

Dealing with Mexico is no easy task. Nevertheless, the United States can and must do better with its geographical neighbor, even though our political cultures are quite different. This essay develops a strategy for Mexico that reflects coherence between ends, ways and means, while also keeping in mind that asymmetry in power is a reality, and not

forgetting that Mexicans need the United States as much as we need them.

The focus of the paper is the strategic implications of the Mexican insurgency, with attention to the roles played by the Mexican military and the executive branch of government. Both the military and the government can be positively influenced by our encouragement to take initiatives that foster internal democracy. Furthermore, the insurgency problem can be solved, and the military can play a more constructive role that garners public support, rather than criticism. The government will also need to reevaluate the manner in which it deals with the poor of southern Mexico, developing programs that provide opportunity, security and justice for those who have lost faith in their political system, many of whom have taken up arms as a last resort.⁹

Without a new strategy, NAFTA is in jeopardy because growing insurrections could destabilize the country or force the military into a larger political role that could jeopardize Mexico's transition to a full-fledged democratic state. The stakes are high, but so are the rewards of altering our approach. It might even cause us to make some institutional changes in our own way of doing business, such as redesigning our military command structure in the Americas, creating more balance and coherence between economic, political and military

strategies. Given that the Zapatista uprising completely surprised the U.S. government, there is certainly room for improvement in how we prepare, shape and respond.¹⁰

THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF MEXICO

Mexico is a pivotal country for the United States because of its ability to affect regional and international stability. Its internal balance between progress and turmoil has a direct impact on U.S. trade, investment, banking, immigration, drugs, pollution, and concern for violence and human rights.¹¹ The challenge for the United States is to accelerate the development of a strategy to achieve an end - the reinforcement of Mexican stability through democratic ways and means. To do so will require a new policy framework and direction in which the Washington narrows its scope in dealing with the world. Essentially, the United States must focus its efforts on a smaller number of countries "whose fate is uncertain and whose future will profoundly affect their regions."¹² Mexico clearly merits this status as a pivotal state, and reflects many vital U.S. national interests.

NAFTA has done more to connect the United States with its southern neighbor than any other agreement. Our exports have grown significantly, making it our second-largest trading partner.¹³ Mexico's economic growth potential is enormous and

has huge implications for our country, which stands to gain much from NAFTA. Moreover, the success of NAFTA has been the foundation for the creation of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) that is projected to begin in 2005.¹⁴ The FTAA creates a hemispheric market that stretches from Canada to Chile. With Latin America becoming the fastest growing economic region in the world, it is expected that our exports to this area will exceed those to the European Union in 1998.¹⁵ From cost-effective manufacturing labor to large reserves of oil, Mexico looms large in the U.S. economy.

On the other hand, if Mexico fails to maintain economic and political stability, NAFTA is in trouble, and so are the future prospects of the FTAA. Mexico provides the most important economic opportunity for the United States to enjoy the benefits of free trade in this hemisphere. It is the economic gateway to the rest of Latin America.

There are many political reasons for the United States to be concerned about and involved with Mexico, ranging from drug interdiction to democratic reform. This paper is most concerned with insurgency movements in southern Mexico because they have tremendous potential as a catalyst, either positive or negative, that can significantly affect other political challenges to stability. A critical scenario feared by both countries would be that an escalation of violence by insurgent groups caused

massive capital flight, thus sending Mexico into a deep depression.¹⁶ Such a scenario might motivate angry citizens to rise up against the government, and put great pressure on the military to restore order. All of this would be disastrous for the United States, producing great economic losses, waves of illegal immigrants, violence along the border, and quite possibly the emergence of a military dictatorship next door.

Another aspect of Mexico's strategic importance revolves around the newfound U.S. imperative "to strengthen democratic institutions and root out corruption."¹⁷ The fact is that the United States largely ignored such issues in the 1980s and much of the 1990s, as government officials were concerned that raising these issues could jeopardize the passage and implementation of NAFTA.¹⁸ This does not reflect well upon the priorities of the United States and opens our country to significant international criticism. Mexico is moving closer to becoming a democracy, but it is still more corporatist than democratic in reality.

Corporatism is a system of representation that gives groups political standing in a noncompetitive manner, often organized and sanctioned by the state, receiving benefits in exchange for support for the regime.¹⁹ In a democracy, the source of legitimacy is the citizen or individual, whereas in corporatism it is the corporation or group.²⁰ Mexico developed this system

so well that to outsiders it appeared to be a democracy.

Insiders, however, knew better.²¹

Mexico has been dominated and governed for 70 years by the same political party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). To maintain political power, the PRI carefully doled out benefits to those groups that supported it and punished those that did not obey. This strategy of political, economic and social co-optation perpetuated a one-party system, even if was not economically progressive or democratic. Government corruption was the oil that lubricated the political machine.²²

If there is one event that can be considered the beginning of the unraveling of Mexican corporatist machine, it was the national election of 1988. The PRI presidential candidate, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, was elected despite charges of massive fraud and an electoral computer crash that lasted for a week. The international press and the opposition believed that the PRI had actually lost, although official results gave Salinas just over 50% of the vote. From that time forward, the PRI was destined to face a stormy future that could not guarantee its domination, even with the continued patronage of various groups within Mexico. On 6 July 1997, it lost its majority in Congress. The party gave up 112 congressional seats, its majority in local congresses of 7 states, and the governorships of 2 states. Adding insult to injury, the federal

district (covering Mexico City) went to the PRI's archenemy, the leftist Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD).²³ The next presidential election in 2000 will be the ultimate test of the PRI's ability to maintain power.

This political transition is of immense importance to U.S. strategic interests. If Mexico can continue to democratize the stability of the state and its relations with the United States might improve. This is not inevitable, however. The elections of 1997 reflected a backlash against the economic policies of the PRI - over 70% of people surveyed were adamant about the need for change.²⁴ This desire for change may go against the economic interests of the United States, including NAFTA, unless the Mexican government places more emphasis on policies that promote greater opportunity for the working class and the poor. Extreme income inequality exists in Mexico. The country has more billionaires than any other Latin American country; it also has a high number of very poor that have not shared in the economic growth of the last 10 years.²⁵ This worsening distribution seems to have been exacerbated by market-friendly economic reforms, which have benefited the upper class and hurt the poor.²⁶

REBELLION IN MEXICO: CAUSES AND EFFECTS

If any one group did not share in the fruits of Mexican corporatism, it was the Indians, particularly those who lived in the remote southern areas. In colonial times, they were dominated by large landholders, under a system similar to slavery. In Chiapas, Indians have a history of rebelling against the tyranny of elites that dates back to the Tzeltal revolt of 1712. Today, many are still being exploited by landholding elites who control capital and oppose economic opportunity for Indians. The largest landholders are predominantly *mestizo* and wish to keep the Indian at the lowest economic, political and social standing.

During this century, the revolutionary promise of land reform was not fully implemented. The PRI exploited this by promising to further redistribute land at a later date, which served to promote stability in these rural areas. New government agencies were created to further co-opt Indians, gaining their support in exchange for social welfare benefits. The problem was that the PRI was not able to maintain strong control in remotely situated areas like Chiapas. This resulted in peasants publicly pledging support to the regime, while they privately expressed opposition to the corrupt local leadership.²⁷ A good example of this was in the 1988 national election, where President Salinas was given credit for receiving 90% of the

Chiapas vote, though opposition parties were able to document extensive electoral fraud on the part of the PRI. This further confirmed that the government had removed another legal recourse for peasants and pushed them toward armed rebellion.²⁸

By the early 1990's, government policies had alienated Indians and caused the PRI to lose political legitimacy. Policies that encouraged economic liberalization or neoliberalism, institutional reform of the state (less bureaucracy) and targeted social programs (social welfare reductions), resulted in the exclusion of Indians from markets, a sense of having been abandoned by the state, and the agony of an inadequate safety net.²⁹ Subsidies, financing, and crop price guarantees were drastically reduced or removed as part of President Salinas' plan to modernize agriculture under a free market system oriented to external markets. The unintended consequence of was that most Indians saw themselves as being fully excluded from the corporatist equation. The result was that many rejected the government bureaucracy as their means of interest representation and became attracted to the EZLN.³⁰ Perhaps the most important government action to move peasants toward rebellion was the revision of Article 27 of the constitution, which permitted members of *ejidos* (communal farms) to sell their land, much to the liking of the landholding elites.³¹

If ever a region was ripe for revolution it was Chiapas. Though extremely rich in natural resources, it is the poorest state in Mexico. Chiapas has very little industrial growth, high birth rates, low levels of government investment in infrastructure, high levels of illiteracy, and some of the worst living conditions, as measured by access to water, drainage and electricity.³² It also has the highest percentage of Indians in all of Mexico.

The Chiapas rebellion was many years in the making. Subcommander Marcos, their Marxist *mestizo* leader, came to the region in the early 1980's determined to create a rebellion. He started by organizing Indian peasants into a self-defense group to counter the violent actions of the "White Guards" hired by wealthy landowners, who were brutally adept at driving peasant squatters off large estates. This self-defense organization evolved into the Zapatista Army or EZLN.³³

Indirectly, Marcos was aided by Catholic and Protestant movements. Bishop Samuel Ruiz of San Cristobal has long been an advocate for the rights of Indians. Like many other Latin American Catholic clergy serving among the rural poor, he is an advocate of liberation theology, which is a hybrid of Christianity and Marxism that favors the poor.³⁴ He has been a longtime critic of the police and military because of their actions to control the Indians. Bishop Ruiz has devoted much of

his life to serving the poor Indians of Chiapas. Protestant evangelism in the region gave peasant women new social standing that empowered them to assert themselves socially and politically, while encouraging their husbands to quit drinking. It also led to their expulsion from Indian communities by *caciques* or local bosses, who were upset over liquor profit losses at their festivals because of these clean living converts.³⁵ Religious support for the poor, new roles for women, and the effects of displacement assisted the EZLN in their recruitment.

Early on 1 January 1994, the EZLN shocked the Mexican nation by capturing four cities in the Los Altos region of Chiapas. Though poorly armed, their element of surprise and large numbers convinced many people that this insurgent group, unlike many others in recent Mexican history, was well organized from the start. The EZLN gained public sympathy quickly, as its leaders did not communicate a desire to seize control of the nation, although they did declare war against the federal army and government in their quest for "jobs, land, housing, food, health, education, independence, freedom, justice and peace."³⁶ They also included women in leadership roles, something that attracted much public attention.

The Mexican Army was called in to put down the insurrection, and this it accomplished by 12 January 1994, although not

without brutality or the escape of the guerillas. Military operations were halted when President Salinas called for a unilateral cease-fire. Army forces in the region swelled sevenfold to over 14,000 troops, forming a cordon around the rebel's stronghold in the Lacandon jungle.³⁷ President Salinas halted the fighting because the rebellion was much more than a political embarrassment; it was an indictment against the legitimacy of the Mexican system of government, as was indicated by the considerable public support for the *Zapatistas* and national guilt over the plight of Indian peasants. These developments exposed the extensive corruption of political leaders, government agencies, and certain peasant organizations that accepted funds from the PRI-dominated regime in exchange for support. Concurrently, it brought to light the violent repression of independent peasant movements by police, military and ranchers.³⁸ The government may have quickly won its first battle with the EZLN, but it was losing the larger war because popular support was moving away from the government and toward the rebels.

Subsequently, the rebellion entered a new phase of negotiations and stalemate. The military and police occupied the populated areas, and the *Zapatistas* retreated to the jungle. Though there have been occasional military offensives to keep the rebels at bay, although the EZLN has been effective in

establishing "shadow governments" in many villages to represent the interests of its supporters. But counterinsurgency changed dramatically when paramilitary organizations entered the fray. Because the army was only able to repel the EZLN, not defeat it, the government turned to fostering paramilitary forces to defeat the Indian rebellion and frighten citizens in a low-intensity war.³⁹

The paramilitaries evolved from the White Guards of the landholding elites. Ironically, most of the members are poor young men who have no land, are unemployed, and are unattached to a community because of their itinerant lifestyle. These elements were paid to follow orders from organizations such as Peace and Justice, which counts Samuel Sanchez Sanchez, a PRI deputy to the Chiapas State, as one of its leaders.⁴⁰

Particularly troubling has been the fact that the military has not acted to suppress the paramilitaries. Indeed, there have been reports that the army and police have encouraged and provided assistance to some of these groups. The upshot, on 22 December 1997, was a massacre of 45 unarmed peasants at Acteal by a paramilitary organization linked to the PRI.⁴¹

Further complicating the situation is that the Zapatistas are no longer the only revolutionary actors in Mexico. Indeed, their bold actions may be further encouraging other disenfranchised Mexicans to rise up in arms. The Revolutionary

People's Army (EPR), founded in May 1994, has merged with other small leftist groups to form a political-military organization called the Revolutionary Popular Democratic Party (PDPR). This reportedly directs the activities of 14 guerilla and opposition groups, the best known being the Revolutionary Clandestine Workers' Union Party of the People-Party of the Poor (PROCUP-PDLP).⁴² This insurgency, unlike the EZLN, has spread its forces and violence to many Mexican states, although its stronghold is still in Guerrero.

EPR representatives have told journalists that their military focus is national and that they have no fear of opposing the Mexican army's superior numbers and weapons because of their advantages of creativity, audacity, mobility, surprise, knowledge of the terrain, and support of the people.⁴³ They referred to their *Encino* attack as an example of their tactical ability, estimating Mexican army casualties at 15 killed, with 30 wounded.⁴⁴ This assault was one of many launched in several states in summer 1996, as part of their larger campaign for expansion and recognition. Though their public appeal is limited due their use of violence against their own members for straying and other leftist groups who are not sufficiently revolutionary, they are apparently better financed than the EZLN, their funding bolstered by successful robberies and kidnappings.⁴⁵

Because the EPR spread its insurgency operations far beyond Oaxaca, it indirectly had a major effect on many Mexican communities. In response to these attacks, President Ernesto Zedillo (who succeeded Salinas in 1994) ordered a major deployment of the military in the states of Guerrero, Oaxaca, Morelos, Quintana Roo, Campeche, Tabasco, Jalisco and Chihuahua. The military and police became frustrated in their search for members of the EPR which intensified the manner in which they interacted with the public, particularly with those they suspected of being members or supporters of the guerillas, and this led to further human rights abuses.⁴⁶ According to Vicente Fox, the governor of Guanajuato, this increased army presence throughout a large portion of Mexico came with a great risk - "the militarization of the country."⁴⁷ The EPR has been quiet for over a year, but that does not mean they will not emerge again.

MEXICAN POLITICAL AND MILITARY RESPONSES AND ROLES

When faced with the EZLN rebellion in early 1994, President Salinas took three major actions - he deployed the army, increased the flow of government outlays for public infrastructure improvements, and launched peace negotiations. None of these moves brought the approval that he desired. The army dislodged the EZLN from occupied towns, yet in their operation to clear the village of Ocosingo soldiers executed

five men.⁴⁸ This and other human rights violations made the front pages of national and foreign newspapers. The government denied that the military had committed acts of torture, rape and extrajudicial execution in spite of witnesses and forensic evidence to the contrary. By not confronting these problems openly and honestly, the Mexican government demonstrated that it lacked the political will to enforce the protection of human rights.⁴⁹

Increased aid to Chiapas did not engender much public support because there was more concern about corruption prior to the rebellion. It was learned that governors of Chiapas, past and present, had used their office to approve projects that resulted in personal gain, involving enormous sums of money and often resulting in waste, fraud and abuse.⁵⁰ Ironically, the Salinas government had poured more money into Chiapas prior to the rebellion than into any other state on a per capita basis. Apart from corruption, what lessened the effect of these large sums were extravagant and ridiculous projects, such as the huge hospital built in the Lancandon jungle village of Guadalupe Tepeyac. Oversized and understaffed, it was another example of the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of Mexican corporatism.⁵¹

After firing several leaders and administrators for their incompetence in handling Chiapas, President Salinas appointed Foreign Minister Manuel Camacho Solis to serve as the

government's peace negotiator on 10 January 1994. Camacho had boldly (though privately) criticized the government attempts to play down the size and extent of the rebellion. He was blunt in telling Salinas that (1) Mexico's prestige in the world had now largely been lost, (2) a pounding in the financial markets was on the way, and (3) peace efforts were called for because an army victory against its own Indians would only worsen the national crisis.⁵² He served as the peace commissioner until 16 June 1994, when he resigned after being criticized by PRI presidential candidate Ernesto Zedillo for failing to achieve an agreement with the EZLN. Camacho strongly rejected this criticism. In his resignation letter, he accused the PRI of not supporting his peace efforts and ignoring the opportunity to achieve genuine political dialogue.⁵³ Camacho's successor was able to get the political parties to agree on some electoral reforms but the EZLN rejected them. There was no peace accord.

When human rights groups detailed the abuses committed by the Mexican army, President Salinas did little to refute them. This was extraordinary considering the corporatist and symbiotic relationship that had been in effect for over half a century. Traditionally, the executive has continually praised the military and allowed it great institutional discretion and in return the latter has provided firm support for civilian supremacy.⁵⁴ But after the first few weeks of the conflict,

General Antonio Riviello, the Secretary of Defense, "recognized that the army could no longer depend on the president, and so the military began to take measures to defend itself."⁵⁵ As a result, General Miguel Godinez, who was the senior commander in Chiapas, held a press conference to deny the accusations of torture and summary execution. In private conversations, senior officers complained that the government had known about the EZLN for several years but had done nothing about it for fear of jeopardizing NAFTA, had left them out of the planning, and then tried to use them as scapegoats for the disaster.⁵⁶ General Riviello also spoke out in public, strongly defending the army. His main points were that (1) the military had maintained its loyalty to the president, the constitution and its internal defense mission, (2) Mexican soldiers had been killed due to EZLN aggression, and (3) the army was fully behind government efforts to make peace.⁵⁷

On the positive side, the military did benefit from a major increase in defense spending for fighting insurgents and drug traffickers, which resulted in larger and better equipped forces. From 1995 to 1996 the defense budget increased by over 44%. There also were more military training opportunities abroad, particularly in the United States under the International Military Education and Training Program (IMET). Another favorable sign was that President Zedillo, unlike

Salinas, was publicly praising the army as "an institution of honor and loyalty" and "an organization of peace and for the peace...contributing to democracy."⁵⁸

Even with better support from the executive, the military's role had changed significantly. Major drug interdiction and counterinsurgency missions had not been the traditional stock and trade of its operations. Its traditional missions were civic action, disaster relief, quelling minor disturbances, election security, parades and environmental protection - none of which brought much public scrutiny or criticism. Now the armed forces were faced with high profile missions that risked harsh judgment, which was antithetical to the military culture. For decades, Mexico had faced no real external threat, so internal security had always been the key national security imperative. Even so, much of that role had been understood to be one of reducing the danger by strengthening the regime and assisting the people.⁵⁹ Large military operations against rebels were rarely a major focus.⁶⁰

Before Chiapas, the military had enjoyed the benefits of anonymity and secrecy. The institution grew apart from society, operated away from the limelight, resisted outside examination, and received little attention, whether with respect to budget or operational accountability.⁶¹ Today, however, it is subject to much more national and international interest. Mexicans are

questioning government outlays for defense, particularly since security does not seem to have improved in spite of this costly modernization program.⁶² Now the military is forced to work on public relations, account for its actions, defend its growing budget, reconsider its counterinsurgency training, and decide what relationship it should maintain with the government.⁶³ Such are the challenges of a transition from corporatism to democracy.

CHALLENGES FOR U.S. COOPERATION WITH MEXICO

The most important obstacle to U.S. relations with Mexico is an enormous and pervasive lack of trust on both sides that has deep historical roots. Mexico still cannot accept the fact that it lost half its territory to the United States a century and a half ago.⁶⁴ It also resents the fact that its northern neighbor has greater political, economic and military power, which has often placed it at a negotiating disadvantage and subject to undue influence. Except for NAFTA, U.S. policy toward Mexico has often amounted to benign neglect and sharp criticism. Even our drug interdiction efforts have not bolstered our standing with Mexico, largely because we viewed drugs as a Mexican supply - not U.S. demand - problem until recently. There has also been precious little done to assist in solving the problem of rebellion. In turn, Mexico's expectation is that it will be treated unfairly - which then justifies its continuing suspicion

and distrust of *gringos*.⁶⁵ This dearth of understanding, acceptance, and goodwill between neighbors must change in order to enhance the viability of options that foster Mexican political stability and mutual economic growth.

How should the United States alter its approach to Mexico? First, it must commit itself to improving the form and substance of its communications with Mexico. Regarding form, public comments about Mexico that reflect respect, friendship, interdependence, strength, trust, democracy, trade and honor should be emphasized, while public criticisms about drugs, corruption, one-party rule, political reform, pollution, illegal immigration, human rights, and rebellion should be reserved for private discussions. Unless we can assuage Mexican sensitivity to criticism and their tendency to overreact, the opportunities to influence them will be few and infrequent. This is not to say that Washington should turn a blind eye to Mexican actions that are detrimental to democracy, only that an asymmetric method is required to handle a relationship that is not yet on a level playing field.

Mexico and the United States are now more partners than ever before due to NAFTA. This economic agreement is an opportunity to improve relations in the political and military realms. Currently, however, things are out of balance and must be corrected. The message that we are sending Mexico is that we

prefer to emphasize capitalism rather than democracy. To many Mexicans who have suffered economically as result of NAFTA, there is a growing sense that neoliberalism is another way for U.S. and Mexican elites to gain at their expense.

NEW STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The United States should discontinue supporting the Mexican military's role in drug interdiction. While concerns about extensive corruption in Mexican law enforcement are valid, that does not mean that the military is better suited for this mission. Washington must redirect its support to the Mexican police, even if the short-term prospects are difficult. The military's role in fighting drugs has damaged it as an institution, subjecting it to increased corruption; it has also increased its political role.
2. Mexico's best solution to counterinsurgency is to make peace, not war, with the rebels. The United States should do everything it can to encourage and promote an agreement that ends this internal conflict. The Mexican government must accept those peace provisions that support democracy. An important condition for getting the EZLN to the bargaining table again is to have Bishop Ruiz return to his role as president of the peace

commission.⁶⁶ The government must also end the militarization of southern Mexico.

3. Develop a U.S. partnership with Mexico to build schools, clinics, water plants and other facilities in southern Mexico. Revolutionary zeal fades when living conditions improve and people see that the government does care. Prioritize projects based on need and level of rebellion, while ensuring that local input is included.
4. Develop a U.S. partnership with Mexico to encourage entrepreneurial growth in the southern part of the country.⁶⁷ Support Mexico, dollar-for-dollar, in a loan fund that makes small (less than \$500), short term, low interest loans to poor Mexicans who can demonstrate that they can succeed in an existing small business.⁶⁸ Encourage international non-governmental organizations to do the same. Peasants are less likely to rebel if they can earn a decent wage. Concurrently, we should encourage Mexico to review and assess its land reform and social welfare policies.
5. Reorganize the Unified Command Plan (UCP), creating an Americas Command, incorporating the U.S. Atlantic and Southern Commands, as was recommended by the National Defense Panel in 1997.⁶⁹ One additional change is that the Americas Command be organized with two subunified

commands, a new North American Command and the existing Southern Command. The North American Command, like NAFTA, would consist of Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Moving from bilateral arrangements to an organization that reflects regional economic realities and security concerns is a better strategy, particularly considering our burgeoning trade through NAFTA and the growing threat of terrorism that can penetrate through our borders.

6. Set up a North American Peacekeeping Force (NAPF) with Mexico and Canada. A light-heavy regiment-size unit would be assembled annually to conduct training for one month, with exchanges in between. Training locations would rotate among the three countries. NAPF funding shares might be 60% U.S., 25% Canadian and 15% Mexican. The unit commander position would be U.S. and the deputy commander position would rotate between Canada and Mexico. The NAPF would only be deployed by consent of all three countries. Certain training objectives, such as human rights protection, would be of great benefit to those soldiers trained. This multinational force would also promote improved understanding and cooperation between member countries. It also has the potential to

give Mexico greater international prestige and improve military professionalism.

7. The United States should encourage Mexico to reinvigorate its military's civic action program. A return to public works, from bridge construction to furnishing medical services, is sorely needed. This would not only fill great needs in southern Mexico, but also help rebuild the armed forces' reputation with the peasantry, who need to see soldiers helping their communities. The United States could support this effort by deploying military engineer and logistics units, if accepted by the Mexican government, to work with Mexican units.⁷⁰ Those who criticize civic action missions should remember that this was an important and successful U.S. military mission in the development of our country.⁷¹

CONCLUSIONS

The United States must deal with Mexico in an asymmetric and reinforcing manner that elevates democratic ideals to a level commensurate with that of our economic interests, as evidenced by NAFTA. Given historic conflicts, animosities and fears, we need to guard against publicly pushing too hard, lest our efforts be counterproductive. Unless the United States is prepared to commit to a long-term strategy that includes new ways of approaching Mexico, our current "quick fixes" will

result in a further deterioration of relations with a pivotal state that represents many vital U.S. national interests. It should be clear that Mexico is in the middle of a very difficult and dangerous transition from corporatism to democracy. If we fail to change our current strategy, the country could become less stable, thus jeopardizing the viability of NAFTA and the Free Trade Area of the Americas.⁷²

There are important opportunities for the United States to improve its relations with the Mexican executive branch and military. Our current policies are not improving the democratic quality of these institutions, nor are they decreasing the flow of drugs or the threat of insurgency. The militarization of Mexico has not increased security nor improved the image of the armed forces.⁷³ Rather, it has given the military more power and decreased its accountability to civilian authority.⁷⁴ These trends could eventually threaten civilian rule.⁷⁵ Further exacerbating the problem is that paramilitary organizations supported by the regime have created a "dirty war" that only encourages the EZLN to opt for a prolonged conflict.⁷⁶ Mexico has the ability to make peace with the insurgents and address the economic inequality of its Indian peasants, whose exploitation has been sanctioned by the government. In these endeavors, the United States can assist.

Some argue that a "Colombianization" of Mexico has occurred because of the increase in political corruption from drugs and the decrease in security due to violent crime and insurgency.⁷⁷ This author does not yet share that view, but that could change. The Mexican elections of 2000 will indicate which direction the country will go. But time is running out of time for the United States to support democracy in Mexico: A military faction recently protested publicly against the government,⁷⁸ new government economic policies are hurting the poor,⁷⁹ and the austerity of the 1999 national budget threatens stability.⁸⁰

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ENDNOTES

¹ Tim Golden, "U.S.-Aided Effort by Mexican Army Fizzles," The New York Times, 23 December 1998, A1 and A6.

² Ibid.

³ Graham H. Turbiville, Jr., "Law Enforcement and the Mexican Armed Forces: New Internal Security Missions Challenge the Military," Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement 6 (Autumn 1997): 77-78.

⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, edited by J.P. Mayer (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1988), 228-229 and 642-643. De Tocqueville criticizes the democracy of the United States for being unable to stay the course in diplomacy because Americans are impatient people who are more interested in action than in thinking - be it theory or strategy.

⁵ Martin Edwin Andersen, "Civil-Military Relations and Internal Security in Mexico: The Undone Reform," in The Challenge of Institutional Reform in Mexico, edited by Riordan Roett (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 163-164.

⁶ Human Rights Watch/Americas, Implausible Deniability: State Responsibility for Rural Violence in Mexico, (New York, N.Y.: Human Rights Watch, 1997), 22-37.

⁷ Ibid., 89.

⁸ Molly Moore, "U.S. Attache, Aide Stray Into Chiapas Face-Off," Washington Post, 29 July 1998, A17.

⁹ Ginger Thompson, "Where Killings Defiled a Church, No Forgiveness," The New York Times, 23 December 1998, A8.

¹⁰ Andres Oppenheimer, Bordering on Chaos, (New York, N.Y.: Little, Brown and Company, 1996), 31-32.

¹¹ Robert S. Chase, Emily B. Hill and Paul Kennedy, "Pivotal States and U.S. Strategy," Foreign Affairs 75 (January/February 1996): 37-38.

¹² Ibid., 33.

¹³ William J. Clinton, A National Security Strategy for a New Century, (Washington, D.C.: The White House, October 1998), 50

¹⁴ Ibid., 49.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Nicholas D. Kristof, "As Free-Flowing Capital Sinks Nations, Experts Prepare to Rethink System," The New York Times, 20 September 1998, 18.

¹⁷ Clinton, A National Security Strategy for a New Century, 19.

¹⁸ Jacqueline Mazza, "Policy by Default: The U.S. Executive Branch and Democracy in Mexico, 1980-1995," paper presented at

the Latin American Studies Association convention on 24 September 1998, 1-3.

¹⁹ Douglas A. Chalmers, "Corporatism and Comparative Politics," in New Directions in Comparative Politics, edited by Howard J. Wiarda (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 59.

²⁰ John Ralston Saul, "Language and Lying - the Return of Ideology," Queen's Quarterly 102 (Winter 1995): 826.

²¹ Interview with Federico Reyes Heróles in Mexico City, Mexico on 10 June 1991.

²² Alan Riding, Distant Neighbors: A Portrait of the Mexicans, (New York, N.Y.: Vantage Books, 1989), 113-133.

²³ Denise Dresser, "Mexico after the July 6 Election: Neither Heaven nor Hell," Current History 97 (February 1998): 55.

²⁴ Ibid., 56

²⁵ Albert Berry, "The Income Distribution Threat in Latin America," Latin American Research Review, 32 (#2 1997): 4-6. As of 1994, Mexico had 24 billionaires.

²⁶ Ibid., 3.

²⁷ Neil Harvey, Rebellion in Chiapas, (San Diego, CA: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, UCSD, 1994), 4-6.

²⁸ George A. Collier, Basta! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas, (Oakland, CA: Food First, 1994), 79-80.

²⁹ Ibid., 6.

³⁰ Arturo Alvarado, "Entre la Reforma y la Rebelion: El Campo Durante el Salinismo," Foro Internacional 36 (January-June 1996): 140, 155.

³¹ Stephen J. Wager and Donald E. Schulz, "The Zapatista Revolt and its Implications for Civil-Military Relations and the Future of Mexico," Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs 37 (Spring 1995): 7.

³² Ibid., 3.

³³ Oppenheimer, Bordering on Chaos, 72

³⁴ Edward A. Lynch, "Reform and Religion in Latin America," Orbis 42 (Spring 1998): 270.

³⁵ Philip L. Russell, The Chiapas Rebellion, (Austin, TX: Mexico Resource Center, 1995), 9.

³⁶ Harvey, Rebellion in Chiapas, 1-2.

³⁷ Wager and Schulz, "The Zapatista Revolt," 15.

³⁸ Collier, Basta! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas, 76-78.

³⁹ Luis Hernandez Navarro, "The Escalation of the War in Chiapas," NACLA Report on the Americas: Counterinsurgency in Chiapas and Colombia 31 (March/April 1998): 7.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 8-9.

- ⁴¹ Ibid., 7.
- ⁴² Donald E. Schulz, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: The United States, Mexico and the Challenge of National Security," Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement 6 (Winter 1997): 7.
- ⁴³ Guillermo Correa y Julio Cesar Lopez, "El EPR reta al gobierno: Dice que ya sabe donde estamos... La Realidad es que no nos golpeado porque no ha podido," Proceso, 25 August 1996, 8.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Schulz, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place," 7-8.
- ⁴⁶ Salvador Corro, "Operativos militares en casi todo el pais: retenes, vuelos de reconocimiento y patrullajes para aplicar toda la fuerza del Estado al EPR," Proceso, 8 September 1996, 7-13.
- ⁴⁷ Gerardo Galarza, "El riesgo en el combate al EPR, es que los duros quieren militarizar al pais: Vicente Fox," Proceso, 8 September 1996, 20.
- ⁴⁸ Physicians for Human Rights and Human Rights Watch/Americas, Waiting for Justice in Chiapas, (Boston, MA: Physicians for Human Rights, 1994): 69-78. Some of the five men may have been innocent bystanders. It is also significant to note that this same report also found the EZLN to have committed human rights abuses, although not on the same magnitude as the army.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 3.
- ⁵⁰ Oppenheimer, Bordering on Chaos, 37-39.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 55-56.
- ⁵² Ibid., 43-44.
- ⁵³ Physicians, Waiting for Justice in Chiapas, 24-25.
- ⁵⁴ Roderic Ai Camp, Generals in the Palacio, (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1992), 9.
- ⁵⁵ Wager and Schulz, "The Zapatista Revolt," 21.
- ⁵⁶ Andersen, "Civil-Military Relations," 169.
- ⁵⁷ Wager and Schulz, "The Zapatista Revolt," 22.
- ⁵⁸ Carlos Acosta Cordova, "Desde el Levantamiento de Chiapas, Febril Modernizacion y Equipamiento del Ejercito e Incremento de sus Areas de Influencia," Proceso, 4 August 1996, 8-9.
- ⁵⁹ Camp, Generals in the Palacio, 85-87.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 91. The last significant counterinsurgency campaign was in 1974 when the PRI candidate for governor of Guerrero, Ruben Figueroa, was kidnapped by a guerilla group.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 3-13.
- ⁶² Cordova, "Desde el Levantamiento de Chiapas," 8-9.
- ⁶³ Wager and Schulz, "The Zapatista Revolt," 22-27.
- ⁶⁴ Riding, Distant Neighbors, 316.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 317

⁶⁶ Samuel Ruiz, "The Politics of Marginalization: Poverty and the Rights of the Indigenous People in Mexico," interview by Alina Rocha Menocal, Journal of International Affairs 52 (Fall 1998): 85-100.

⁶⁷ Hernando de Soto, The Other Path, (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1989). This work is an excellent discussion of the economic potential of the Latin American poor.

⁶⁸ James Brooke, "Lending a Hand to the Small Latin Entrepreneur," The New York Times, 1 August 1991, D6. A United States-based aid group, Accion International, developed loan portfolios that were financed by Latin American banks at market rates. This organization provided loans to 68,000 businesses in 13 Latin American countries, creating 40,000 new jobs in 1990. It should also be noted that the United States has funded successful small business loan programs in such countries as Nicaragua.

⁶⁹ National Defense Panel, Transforming Defense: National Security in the 21st Century, (Arlington, VA: National Defense Panel, December 1997), 72. See also Douglas C. Lovelace, Jr. and Thomas-Durell Young, Defining U.S. Atlantic Command's Role in the Power Projection Strategy, (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, August 1998), 38-39.

⁷⁰ Jack A. LeCuyer, "Military Engineers: Nation Assistance in the New World War, in Warriors in Peacetime, edited by Gabriel Marcella (Essex, England: Frank Cass & Co., 1994), 134.

⁷¹ Donald E. Schulz and Gabriel Marcella, "Latin America: The Unfinished Business of Security," in Warriors in Peacetime, edited by Gabriel Marcella (Essex, England: Frank Cass & Co., 1994), 157.

⁷² Albert R. Coll, "United States Strategic Interests in Latin America: An Assessment," Journal of Inter-American Studies & World Affairs, 39 (Spring 1997): 51-55.

⁷³ Raul Benitez Manaut, "Chiapas: The State and the Armed Forces Against the Insurgency," a paper presented at a conference of the National Defense University, Washington, D.C., on 11 September 1998, 11.

⁷⁴ Julia Preston, "Rights Report on Mexico Says Widespread Abuses Continue," The New York Times, 15 January 1999, A7.

⁷⁵ William S. Ackroyd, "Military Professionalism, Education, and Political Behavior in Mexico," Armed Forces & Society, 18 (Fall 1991): 92. "... the military is taught the values of discipline, order, and authority. This implies that if the government and civilians do not act in accordance with these

values, the military, including Mexico's, may intervene to restore them."

⁷⁶ Ginger Thompson, "Where Killings Defiled a Church, No Forgiveness," 23 December 1998, A8.

⁷⁷ Raul Benitez Manaut, "Implications for Mexico," a paper presented at "Landpower and Ambiguous Warfare: The Challenge of Colombia in the 21st Century," a conference sponsored by the U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 11 December 1998.

⁷⁸ Molly Moore, "Dissident Soldiers Hit Road For Reform," The Washington Post, 16 January 1999, A17-A19. A total of 50 soldiers, including 6 officers, marched through downtown Mexico City protesting government corruption, economic policies, and military abuses.

⁷⁹ Ginger Thompson, "Tortilla Rises: Must Belts Tighten?" The New York Times, 4 January 1999, A4. "In a move that has caused concern among millions of families..., the Mexican Government has ended decades-old corn subsidies and price controls on tortillas....The measure, officials said is part of an effort by President Ernesto Zedillo to reduce Government spending. Last year, they said, tortilla subsidies cost the Government \$1 billion."

⁸⁰ John Ward Anderson, "Mexican Christmas Tree Bare This Year," The Washington Post, 21 December 1998, A22. "With an expensive bank bailout coinciding with plummeting oil prices, Congress is expected to offer a thin gruel of steep tax increases and deep budget cuts to make ends meet."

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